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DAVID WESTHEIMER SPEAKS TO FRIENDS

On Thursday, November 18, at 8:00 PM, David Westheimer, '37 spoke in the Library Lecture Lounge to the fall meeting of the Friends of the Fondren. President Demaris Hudspeth introduced two old friends of Mr. Westheimer, Professor Emeritus George Williams and Houston Post reporter Charlotte Phelan, who in turn introduced the principal speaker.

In Professor Williams' opening remarks read by his wife, Marian, as he was at home with the flu, he reminisced about the obscure beginnings of his friendship with the Westheimers:

"I have known David Westheimer and his wife Dody forever. It must be forever, for I can't remember any beginning to it. The past is all fused together in a kind of cloud, with no distinct events or outlines. Dody I remember back in the haze somewhere as a pretty and intelligent college girl in one of my classes--what class, I don't know. And David recurs in only one picture: an interested and at the same time quizzical, even skeptical, face on the back row of some class or other. Why was he on the back row? It's a small thing, but I have often wondered. Because he came in late? Or because he was modest? Or because he wanted to get as far away from me as possible? Or because a chemistry major felt out of place in an English class? Or because

his last name began with a W? I would really like to know.

"A. E. Houseman (who always went out of his way to be gloomy) once wrote a poem in which he said he wished there was some way of knowing the 'fortunate fellows' at a village fair who would die young. Likewise, I wish there was some way of knowing the 'fortunate fellows' in one's college classes, who will go out and make what we call 'successes' of their lives. If one could only know them early, one could observe them with special care for the sake of posterity, and remember all sorts of amusing and revealing incidents about them, and recall early anecdotes illustrating their character or genius. But (alas!) there seems no way to spot the 'fortunate fellows' early. At any rate, I myself never found a way. Most of the anecdotes I do remember are about people I wish I had never known. So all those anecdotes about David that I should have recorded then, and that would be priceless now, thirty years later, are lost in that cloud of forever that I have been knowing David.

"What I do remember from those old days is that, even then, I realized this young man had character. That is a good English word that other languages don't have in the same sense, and that we ourselves are not too precise about. It implies something like fortitude and self-governance, an independent mind and a persevering heart, self-confidence and self-knowledge, self-criticism and stability. This is character. David has always had it. By the way, I might interject here that a writer may be almost any kind of person--radical odd-ball or conservative square, a way-out guru or a Hemingway he-man, perfect gentleman or natural-born heel--but (underneath the

appearance) he has to have character if he expects to succeed as a writer. David has succeeded.

"I used to value him because he had character; then I came to admire him as a writer; but in the last twenty years I have loved him as a man--because of his loyalty and tolerance, good sense and kindness, warmth and humor, capacity for affection and compassion. Most of you know him, I suppose, as a writer. I wish you could know him (as I do) as a man and a friend.

"And now, perhaps, one little anecdote may be told--possibly at the expense of our Chemistry Department, or maybe of college education in general.

"A few years ago I asked David if all the chemistry courses he had taken at Rice had done him much good.

"'Oh, yes!' he said promptly. 'Once, when I was TV editor for the Post, I reviewed a science-fiction broadcast in which a murdered body was dissolved in a vat of certain chemicals. From my old knowledge of chemistry, I knew that those particular chemicals couldn't possibly dissolve a human body. I got two whole columns out of that. No, indeed! My four years of chemistry at Rice were not wasted!'

"It is a pleasure to be able to introduce Rice's most famous chemistry major: David Westheimer."

Continuing in an anecdotal vein, Charlotte Phelan recounted several incidents which occurred during Mr. Westheimer's five different terms of employment on the Houston Post.

"Of course David was far, far ahead of me. Since he had been at the Post a long time before I ever came, many stories I know about him are hearsay. But some of them come from my own experience. I remember David, always a gentleman, would hold a door for a lady--all doors at the old Post building at Polk and Dowling, that is, except one. This door David would go through first, and that was it. He finally explained one day that once he had opened the door to find a lovely young girl in a handsome uniform. He stood back gallantly to let her through, but it turned out that she was the first of fifty-three members of the Lamar College pep squad, all following one another through the door. David's never forgotten that experience.

"I've seen him nonplussed only once. And that was just for a second, because David had tremendous resiliency and can recover completely in no time at all. He, Post Editor Bill Hobby, and the other cigar smokers in the office were always either exchanging cigars and information about them, or stealing them from one another. Once Bill went on a trip with President Eisenhower, and returned with a souvenir, a cedar lined, leather-covered cigarette box. He was very proud of it, and kept it on his desk filled with Roi Tan cigars. The next time that Bill went on a trip David, knowing full well that some of us were watching him, tiptoed over to Bill's box and lifted the lid. Suddenly he got the strangest expression on his face. He took out of the box a slip of paper that said 'Help yourself, David.' Shaking his head, he went back to his own desk, but returned to Bill's a few minutes later, fully recovered, after letting us read the slip of paper he was dropping back into the box. It said 'I never even looked in here.'

"The other day I was reminiscing with Bill about the days when David worked for the Post. He said, 'David told me why he was leaving the Post. He had learned quite early that no one should be, nor seem to be, more important than his boss. But David said he couldn't even get into his boss's Rambler, it was so small, and he couldn't stand cheap Roi Tan cigars. So, he went to California.'"

After Charlotte Phelan's remarks Mrs. Hudspeth turned the meeting over to the principal speaker, observing as she did so, "David, these are the kinds of stories you have to put up with when you're a legend in your own time."

Westheimer Discusses His New Book

"I remember my first encounter with George Williams, even if he doesn't remember his first with me. It was in the school year of 1936-37 when I took his creative writing course. In those days you had to submit a sample of your work to get into his class, so I turned in an essay Mr. Thomas had given me a '1' on in freshman English. I was accepted into the class, but on the first day, without revealing the name of the author, George Williams read my essay aloud as an example of bad writing. It began, 'A pale and leprous moon shone coldly in the window.' I don't remember the rest.

"While I have you here captive, I thought I'd talk about Lighter than a Feather (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1971, \$7.95), my latest novel. For those of you who don't know what it is about, it tells of an

imaginary invasion of Japan. It's what might have happened had we not dropped the atom bomb and had Japan not surrendered. The title comes from part of a long thing that Japanese soldiers and sailors used to have to memorize called, appropriately, The Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors. Part of the First Precept says, ' . . . be resolved that duty is heavier than a mountain, while death is lighter than a feather.'

"The implied thesis of Lighter than a Feather is that the dropping of the atom bomb was probably preferable from the viewpoint of both the Japanese and Americans to the invasion we had planned. This invasion was originally intended to take place in two phases. The overall conquest of Japan was called Downfall. Operation Olympic, the invasion of the southern island of Kyushu to gain a foothold, was scheduled for November 1, 1945. It was to be followed by an invasion of the main island of Honshu, in the area of Tokyo. This was called Operation Coronet and was to take place in March of 1946. It was thought at the time that the Japanese were strong enough to make it necessary for us to carry out both invasions, but according to what I have read and been told by experts, American and Japanese, the second invasion would not have been necessary. My estimate of American casualties in Olympic is 71,000. But as I got into the book, I wasn't so much concerned with American as with Japanese casualties, which would have been far greater, far greater even than Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined, and probably would have had more lasting effect. The U. S. Atomic Energy Commission reports the total casualties for Hiroshima--the dead, the seriously injured, and the missing--at 140,000; the total for Nagasaki is 72,000. That's a little over 200,000, about one-tenth of my estimate of 2½ million Japanese killed, wounded, and missing had we invaded.

"Another thing that interests me is that you never hear anything about a single raid which was more devastating than either of the atom bomb raids, the fire raid on Tokyo in March, where they had 185,000 casualties, more than either of the atom bombs, and almost as many as the two combined. So apparently what appals people is that one bomb did the damage, not that so many people were killed. Incidentally, none of these raids was as devastating as an attack on Dresden, Germany, where well over 200,000 people were killed or wounded. The British went in first and destroyed Dresden, which the Germans felt would never be attacked, and then later when the rescue work was going on, the Americans came back and bombed it again, to catch all the rescuers in the city. I haven't heard any great outcries against that. This incident in a way refutes statements I have heard that the atom bombs were racist because they were dropped on Japanese and never on Germans.

"Lighter than a Feather is my first novel based almost entirely on research. I researched without any writing at all for about six months. Then I spent about twenty-two months in writing the book, both drafts, but I had to research continuously, which made for very slow writing. I even had to go to Japan twice, the second time after I had finished the first draft of the novel. My material was acquired in various places: our national archives, our Army and Navy historical sections, the Japan Self-Defense Agency historical section, and from a few American historians and a Japanese.

The Japanese researcher I had was named George Kimura. He was in the Japanese Navy towards the end of the war. They used to call roll by name and when

they came to 'Kimura, George' all the other men would start catcalling and booing and saying 'Where did you get a name like George?' because they didn't like Western names. And he'd say, 'Well, you know I can't help it. My parents named me that.' But he still had a hard time. Among other things, he was instrumental in my meeting a Major Kameo Abe, who is now, incidentally, Lieutenant Colonel. I like to think it's because he helped me. Col. Abe was historian for the Japanese Self-Defense Agency, and I met him almost by accident when I had gone to see a former Japanese Colonel who was in charge of the historical section. Col. Abe came in and was at first very reticent when he found out what I was doing. Gradually he warmed up a little, and I found out that for about five years he had been researching exactly the same thing. He had been visiting Kyushu every year, taking pictures, making notes, mapping all the Japanese strong points, and studying the American attack plans. Finally he not only let me look at his pictures, but also gave my researcher-interpreter an itinerary of people to see and places to go.

"A key section of the novel is about a Japanese battalion commander named Tochizawa. I had given Tochizawa a position to defend which was actually a position which would have been used by the Japanese, although I fictionalized the thing. I explained to Col. Abe what I had done and told him that this position was going to hold out quite a while. He said it would never have happened. The battalion commander there was a saki drinker. He was always drunk and his position would have fallen very quickly. Another location, Miyakonojo, a major rail and traffic center, depot for Japanese forces in South Central Kyushu, was to be held by the Japanese 57th Army. In my book it falls on a certain date, and

Col. Abe wrote to tell me that 'The 57th Army is very grateful to you. We think Miyakonojo would have fallen sooner.'

"And now some more personal stories. I think the most harrowing experience I had during the research was in a restaurant in Tokyo. I had gone with George Kimura to a little restaurant off a back alley. It's what we here call a Mom and Pop place; a man and his wife ran it. We ate tempura for an hour or so, and then I got the bill. It was for \$32 American money. So if you go to Tokyo, stay out of back alleys!

"The second most harrowing experience I had, and I think it was really rougher than the American invasion would have been, was getting from the main island of Japan, Honshu, to Kyushu. I was with Col. Abe and a young interpreter. There were no plane seats and no reserved train seats available to Kyushu from Honshu. The first leg of the trip was from Tokyo to Osaka on a bullet train, the one that goes 900 miles an hour, or something like that. If you haven't been on it you may have seen it in newsreels. We had our own reserved seats on it. We got to Osaka and transferred to another train for a sixteen-hour trip to Kogoshimu City, Kyushu, which is in the southwest part of the island. There was absolutely no place to sit, so we got off at the next stop, which was Kobe, and went to a coffee shop to talk over our situation. My interpreter and Col. Abe left to see what they could find out while I stayed at the coffee shop and ate a banana split. Then I had a cup of coffee. Then I had two cups of coffee. Finally the shop closed so I had to go outside to wait.

At last the interpreter came back to say they couldn't get on another train, so we were going on

a ferry boat to Kyushu. Instead of going to southwest Kyushu, however, we had to go to northeast Kyushu, since that's where the ferry boat went, through the North Inland Sea. Col. Abe and the interpreter insisted: 'You'll really like it. This is where all the tourists go. The Inland Sea is the most beautiful sea route in Japan. You're never out of sight of these little dots of land covered with trees.' I said, 'Fine.' The line was a mile long, but we finally got on the boat, then on the deck, then down one deck, then another. We ended up in a place which was very strange and Kafkaesque. There were a bunch of long tables pushed back against the wall with people sitting around them, lying under them, lying on them, and lying in the aisles side by side. We had about 12 inches of width, and about 5'10" of length, which was more than enough for me; I'm only 5'9".

"I never saw any of the scenic little islands, since we were well below any of the decks and in this place all night. When dawn came I got up and went on the deck to look at some of the cabins where the tourists who think this is a beautiful trip stay. And the cabins were very beautiful. When I came back, my baggage was gone and all the tables had been moved into the center of the room, covered with Japanese breakfasts. We had slept in the dining room. Incidentally a Japanese breakfast, of which I have had one and do not recommend, is bean paste soup, pickles, rice, and seaweed. And, if you really want to put on a big feed, a raw egg.

"In my research, the most fascinating thing of all was my discovery that kamikaze pilots on a long mission took a box lunch. I started thinking about it and there was a logic to it. When we were attacking the Phillipines, the Japanese knew only

generally where our fleet would be; sometimes they didn't find their target, so they had to go back. Since they were pretty long missions, they carried a box lunch.

"I found that the Japanese have no resentment towards the American people about the war. In Kyushu, where the fiercest of the Samurai used to live on the Satsumo peninsula, one day some Samurai retainers of a lord on this peninsula killed some Englishmen. So the English sent in their fleet to bombard Kagushima City. The Japanese, instead of resenting this attack, were so impressed by the weapons and seamanship of the British that they immediately got in touch with the commander and formed a very friendly relationship with the admiral and his fleet unit. This attitude may have carried forward to World War II.

"The Japanese edition of Lighter than a Feather has just come out this month. The American book jacket shows Americans in a landing craft on the front, and the back shows Japanese defenders. The Japanese edition shows Japanese on the front, the back, and the spine. The front cover of the Japanese edition, which, incidentally, is on the back of the Japanese book because they start at the back of the book and go forwards, is very much like the back of the American edition, except the Japanese in the Japanese edition do not look quite as Japanese as the Japanese in the American edition. I have heard that Col. Abe, who is one of the three persons to whom the book is dedicated, is recommending the book to his students at the Japanese Military Academy as a reference book. I don't know if it is because he approves of what the book says or because his name is in it!

"By the way, I've been told by George Kimura that all of the older Japanese, for example the senior officers, know exactly what 'lighter than a feather' means. But none of the junior officers do. They haven't had to learn this Imperial Rescript, and are consequently unfamiliar with the old Japanese idea that duty is heavier than a mountain while death is lighter than a feather. Apparently there have been great changes in Japan, as in America, since the war.

"Thank you."

DESIDERATA

Since our last issue we have had two heartening responses to this section of the FLYLEAF. With the assistance of funds given by the Friends of the Library, the Departments of Art History and Architecture were enabled to purchase, not the facsimile, but a complete set of original issues of Wendingen, the Dutch periodical listed in Desiderata in the October issue of the FLYLEAF, p. 11. Professor Peter Papademetriou, of the Architecture Department, writes:

"The purchase of the Dutch journal Wendingen marks a valuable addition to the Fondren collection, particularly insofar as we were able to get an original edition and not just a facsimile. I am pleased that in Wendingen we possess this important record of Dutch architecture and the specific influence on Europeans of architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright. Additionally, I am encouraged by the fact that its purchase was a joint venture between two departments of the University and the Friends."

Second, Professor Joseph Cooper, Chairman of the Political Science Department, requested that the following item be inserted in Desiderata as soon as possible, as he is eager to secure the funds to complete this valuable collection of Congressional documents:

U.S. CONGRESS: COMMITTEE HEARINGS, 1839-1946.
(NCR MICROCARD AND GREENWOOD MICROFORM).
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The Library now has Congressional Hearings on microfilm from 1954 to the present. Hearings prior to 1954 have never before been available on microfilm

and remain virtually impossible to obtain in bound form. The critical character of these Hearings as source material in the study of politics, history, economics, and sociology in the United States makes completing our holdings in this area exceedingly desirable.

In addition, the library reports that donors are wanted these items:

DAVIES, J. CONWAY, EDITOR. CATALOGUE OF
INNER TEMPLE MANUSCRIPTS. \$75.00

This three-volume catalogue of the 772 volumes in the Inner Temple Library includes an introduction describing the various collections, with biographies of the principal donors. Five appendices and comprehensive index appear in the final volume. The manuscripts, which are listed in the second volume, range from the twelfth to the twentieth century. They include autograph letters by Edward VI, Lady Jane Grey, Mary Queen of Scots, and Elizabeth I; manuscripts on the State of Quebec, 1762, and on the Instructions for Georgia, 1753; and original letters from statesmen, lawyers, and literary figures.

GOODRICH, LLOYD. EDWARD HOPPER. \$50.00

A long-awaited definitive work of this great American artist who painted twentieth-century America with such insight and poetic feeling. His was a world of lonely buildings, of human beings wrapped in their own timeless moment, and of the New England sunlit coast.

WASSON, R. G. THE HALL CARBINE AFFAIR. \$75.00

"In a familiar tale J. Pierpont Morgan got his start toward wealth and power by buying condemned and

dangerous carbines from Uncle Sam (in the person of General John C. Fremont commanding in the Western Department) at an enormous profit--arms so bad that they 'shot off the thumbs' of those using them. Mr. Wasson dissects the evidence for this legend and finds it a twentieth-century invention of Gustavus Myers, Lewis Corey, et. al." The present definitive edition, revised throughout, is designed and printed by Giovanni Mardersteig in the Stamperia Valdonega, Verona, Italy. Limited to 250 copies on sale, it is a bibliophile's delight.

GIFTS

Professor Emeritus Griffith Conrad Evans, who taught mathematics at Rice from 1912 to 1934, and at the University of California thereafter, has presented to the library a copy of a 1578 edition of Dante's Divine Comedy which he purchased in Italy while studying at the University of Rome as a Sheldon Fellow from Harvard, 1910-12. We are grateful to Professor Evans, not only for the book, but also for this testimony of his continuing affection for Rice.

Gifts for the purchase of books have been received from the Owen Wister Literary Society Alumnae, Rice University; Petro-Tex Chemical Corporation, Houston, Texas; Mr. and Mrs. L. T. Barrow and Mr. and Mrs. Walter L. Church, Jr.

The library has received donations of books from Mr. Andrew Koebel Schwartz, Sr., and Mr. John Wright.

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